

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

1. (Previously Presented) Distribution support equipment configured with a computer system, customer-side equipment, distributor-side equipment, and supplier-side equipment, each equipment being accessible to the computer system through a communication channel for supporting distribution related to business dealings among customers corresponding to the customer-side equipment, distributors including dealers corresponding to the distributor-side equipment, and suppliers corresponding to the supplier-side equipment, the computer system comprising:

    a database storing registered customer IDs, distributors, suppliers, and respective merchandise distribution routes through which each of plural sorts of merchandise ordered by each of the customers is delivered to the customer; the merchandise distribution routes being determined by the distributors and suppliers selected; wherein respective customer IDs and product numbers are linked according to predetermined settings;

    customer specifying means for specifying a customer who has access to the computer system from respective customer-side equipment;

    route specifying means for specifying each of the merchandise distribution routes for the plural sorts of merchandise by accessing the database and then separating one route from another upon receipt of order signals from the customer specified by the customer specifying means to deliver the plural sorts of merchandise to the customer; the route specifying means automatically identifying respective merchandise distribution routes, upon receipt of orders from customers, based on the customer and the product, and then separating the merchandise distribution routes from each other on the basis of product number and category of each of the merchandise items according to predetermined settings;

    first ordering means for automatically generating orders online to dealers of distributor-side equipment on respective merchandise distribution routes specified by the route specifying means; and

    second ordering means for automatically generating orders online to suppliers of supplier-side equipment on respective merchandise distribution routes specified by the route

specifying means;

thereby placing automatic orders to the dealers and suppliers on respective merchandise distribution routes with the first ordering means and the second ordering means.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information processing means is provided with directed-at-dealer ordering means for automatically placing orders to dealers serving as order receivers of respective merchandise routes according to the order signals received from the customer at a time.

4. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information processing means is provided with directed-at-supplier and wholesaler ordering means for allowing a dealer having received orders from the customer to automatically place orders to different suppliers or wholesalers depending upon product numbers and categories of ordered merchandise items according to predetermined settings.

5. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information processing means is provided with shipment instruction means for allowing a dealer having received orders from the customer to automatically give shipment instructions to different deliverers depending upon areas and ordered merchandise items according to predetermined settings.

6. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising selling price setting means for automatically setting a final selling price of a merchandise item for a customer giving an order for the merchandise item by adding a profit ratio for a distributor involved in a merchandise distribution route specified by the route specifying means to a selling price set by a supplier.

7. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising sales and buying management means for managing unit selling price and unit buying price for each distributor or supplier according to predetermined settings while automatically providing each distributor with sales and buying information based on delivery information.

8. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising billing support means for automatically calculating expenses and providing a billed part with information of the expenses thus calculated according to billing conditions stored in a billing condition database storing various billing conditions in relation to delivery, distribution and the like when the billed part wants the information.

9. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising billing and payment management support means for supporting billing and payment management at each supplier or distributor on the basis of sales and buying information according to predetermined settings.

10. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising task apportion support means for allowing dealers to apportion a power of setting in respect of sharing of tasks inherent to a dealer function including customer's ID setting, customer selling price setting and delivery condition setting on a task-by-task basis according to an agreement previously made between the plurality of dealers having overlapping tasks.

11. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management of a customer according to purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer and customer information specified by the customer specifying means and product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.

12. (Original) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 11, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with purchased merchandise classification management means for automatically setting and managing an account item code used in an organization to which the customer belongs depending upon a combination of the customer and customer information comprising a budget management unit in the organization specified by the customer specifying means and the product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.

13. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 11, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with approval route management means for automatically performing purchasing management related to a judgment as to whether or not approval is necessary, a maximum sum of money not requiring approval, an approver, an approval route and the like according to purchase regulations stipulated by the organization to which a customer belongs depending upon a combination of the customer and customer information specified by the customer specifying means and the product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.

14. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 11, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with power setting means for managing the entitlement of a customer to placing orders in an organization to which the customer belongs while judging whether each customer is entitled to a referencing power or an ordering power.

15. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 11, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with manager support means for providing a manager in an organization to which a customer belongs with purchasing information of each customer in the organization thereby allowing the manager conduct centralized management of a purchase budget of the organization.

16. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising customer-by-customer based menu management means for enabling customization of setting of a picture displayed on the customer-side equipment and necessary functions of the customer-side equipment on a customer-by-customer basis.

17. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising free form ordering means for allowing a customer to designate a previously registered dealer to which the customer is capable of addressing an inquiry about an order for a merchandise item which has previously not been established through the customer-side equipment as well as for performing sales management handling the merchandise item as a special handling merchandise item according to an agreement made between the customer and the dealer in relation to the inquiry.

18. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising customer-by-customer based merchandise setting means for establishing at least settings of original categories, names and the like of merchandise items on a customer-by-customer basis aside from categories and names of handleable merchandise items established in the computer system as well as for enabling merchandise item retrieval based on the settings thus made.

19. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising customer's set product number management means for allowing a customer to establish a plurality of product numbers as a set aside from product numbers of merchandise items established in the computer system thereby enabling management based on a customer's own single set product number and to place an order also based on the set product number.

20. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising supplier's set product number management means for establishing a set of product numbers of plural merchandise items for which a supplier is capable of receiving an

order if the merchandise items are combined into a finished product and which are established as plural merchandise items in the computer system thereby enabling an order based on a single set product number.

21. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising automatic delivery time calculation means for automatically calculating a due date for delivery of a merchandise item ordered by a customer by referencing at least delivery situation of a deliverer and working dates of the customer.

22. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising application support means for registering an unspecified number of users having made contact with the computer system as customers capable of business dealing through the computer system, the application support means having a function allowing a user to designate a specific dealer by referencing data of dealers previously registered when the user applies for registration.

23. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising customer registration means for allowing a dealer designated by a user to register the user as a customer of the dealer in the computer system.

24. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising merchandise information database maintenance means for storing information of handleable merchandise items in a merchandise information database incorporated in the computer system and allowing a supplier contacting the computer system to register information of at least merchandise items supplied from the supplier itself in the merchandise information database or renew the information registered in the database.

25. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, further comprising purchasing system linkage means for linking up with other distribution

support equipment and providing customers utilizing the other distribution support equipment with merchandise information stored in the computer system as information of an original merchandise assortment and purchase prices previously established on a customer-by-customer basis by matching merchandise categories established in the computer system with those established in the other distribution support equipment.

26. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1 further comprising supplier linkage means for linking up with a supplier having an original computer system accumulating its own merchandise information to obtain the merchandise information through the computer system of the distribution support equipment.

27. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 26, wherein the supplier linkage means is configured to enable the merchandise information accumulated in the supplier's computer system to be utilized as merchandise information of the computer system of the distribution support equipment by synchronizing the merchandise categories established in the computer system of the distribution support system with those established in the supplier's computer system and applying a ratio variable price established for each merchandise category to a selling price of a merchandise item belonging to each merchandise category established in the supplier's computer system.

28. (Canceled)

29. (Previously Presented) Distribution support equipment configured with a computer system, customer-side equipment, distributor-side equipment, and supplier-side equipment, each equipment being accessible to the computer system through a communication channel for supporting business dealings among customers corresponding to the customer-side equipment, distributors including window contacting customers corresponding to the distributor-side equipment, and suppliers corresponding to the supplier-side equipment, the computer system comprising:

a database storing registered customer IDs, distributors, suppliers, and respective business transaction routes through which each of plural sorts of services ordered by each of the customers is provided to the customer; the business transaction routes being determined by the selected distributors and suppliers; wherein respective customer IDs and product numbers are linked according to predetermined settings;

customer specifying means for specifying a customer who accessed the computer system from respective customer-side equipment;

route specifying means for specifying each of the business transaction routes for the plural sorts of services by accessing the database and then separating one route from another upon receipt of order signals at a time from the customer specified by the customer specifying means to provide the customer with the plural sorts of services; the route specifying means automatically identifying respective merchandise distribution routes, upon receipt of orders from customers, based on the customer and the product, and then separating the merchandise distribution routes from each other on the basis of product number and category of each of the merchandise items according to predetermined settings;

first ordering means for automatically generating orders online to window contacting customers of the distributor-side equipment on respective business transaction routes specified by the route specifying means; and

second ordering means for automatically generating orders online to suppliers of the supplier-side equipment on business transaction routes specified by the route specifying means;

thereby placing automatic orders to the window contacting customers and suppliers on respective business transaction routes with the first ordering means and the second ordering means.

30. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 29, further comprising purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management on a customer-by-customer basis according to preset purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer specified by the customer specifying means and the sorts of services ordered by the customer.

31. (Canceled)

32. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 29 wherein the distributors comprise dealers, wholesalers, or both.

33. (Previously presented) The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1 wherein the distributors comprise dealers, wholesalers, or both.